

Dancing From the Square Formation

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Square Dancing's foundation for years and years were largely dance routines that moved dancers around the square. It was true "square dancing". That is where we picked up "basics" like Allemande Left and Allemande Thar, Alamo Ring, Right & Left Grand, Weave the Ring, Rollaway, Ladies Center & Men Sashay, DoPaso, Grand Square, Shoot the Star, Slip the Clutch and others. Choreography, then, included lots of Ladies Chain, Four hand Stars, Arm Turns and so on.

Much of that choreography is still very useful. However, many callers seem to use it for teaching students in the class and then neglect to use it for calling square dances after graduation. This doesn't make much sense. If beginning dancers have learned how to dance an Allemande Left and an Allemande Thar in class, then square dance callers should be using those same basics in their dance programming.

I included a nice section of circular square dance choreography in "All About Modules". There is also another book that I published named "Dancing For Busy People" that contains lots of circular square dance choreography.

It appears to me that MWSDing is abandoning the square as a Formation for dancing. Here are examples of what I have found. I taught a workshop for callers, several years back, that included some traditional square dance figures. I asked the #1 man to Lead to the Right and Turn the Right Hand Lady Right Hand Around. Then back to the Partner with a Left Hand Around. Then Turn the Opposite Lady with a Right Hand Around and Back to the Partner with a Left Hand Around, and so on. It is a square dance figure that used to be named "The Arkansas Traveler."

Several seasoned callers dancing in the squares had no idea what I was asking them to do. Even after watching the #1 Man dance the routine, some callers experienced problems. Sometimes they froze when it was their turn. Sometimes the couple would try to Lead Right instead of just the man leading right. It was obvious that these callers has never danced that pattern.

Recently, I had a friend who said he asked the Head Couples to Pass Thru and Wheel Around. A caller in a square on the floor spoke up and said the Wheel Around can only be called from a four couple Promenade.

I recently tried to have some square dancers do what used to be called Goal Posting. The Heads/Sides Pass Through ... Separate Around One ... Into the Middle and Pass Thru ... Split the outside two ... Separate Around One ... Down the middle and Right & Left Through. This is a nice simple ZS-ZS module that should be able to be danced by the 4th or 5th night of lessons by any beginner square dancer. Instead, half the squares on the floor crashed.

If you read the CALLERLAB Basic/Mainstream Definitions, on page 29 you will find the following:

“The next four comments refer to uncommon or regional applications of Ladies Chain and may require workshopping.

From a Squared Set, on the call Head Ladies Chain 3/4, often called as “Head Ladies Chain 3/4, Side Men Turn Them”, the head women will do their part of a Four Ladies Chain 3/4 (see below) using a 2-dancer star. The Courtesy Turn will be with the side men, and the ending position will be lines of 3 (boy, girl, girl) at the sides of the set with lonesome head men at the heads of the set. The timing of this application is 10.

From a Squared Set, "Head Ladies Chain Right" or "Head Ladies to the Right, Chain" has each Head couple work with the Side couple on their right. These couples momentarily face, do the call, and then adjust back to a Squared Set. Head Ladies Chain Right is the same as Side Ladies Chain Left.

Each of the above examples are a commentary on what new square dancers are not presently being taught how to dance. It is also a sad commentary on what the present population of modern western square dance callers don't know how to dance or call. Almost all of the examples are good solid entertaining square choreography called from a square formation.